

(Washington, DC)— Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin has introduced legislation to strengthen the federal response to HIV/AIDS. Congresswoman Gwen Moore is a cosponsor of the legislation. The disease remains a public health crisis in our country. Every year, more than 56,000 Americans become infected with HIV, and since the early 1980s, over 10,000 people have been diagnosed with HIV in Wisconsin. Despite medical advances, people living with HIV still face significant physical, emotional, and financial burdens.

Currently, the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act provides medical care for people living with HIV/AIDS who do not have sufficient health care coverage or financial resources to cope with the disease. Many organizations receiving grants through the Ryan White CARE Act serve a large number of Medicaid patients, as well as indigent patients who have no health care coverage. Unfortunately, these organizations often struggle with insufficient funding through the Medicaid system.

Congresswoman Baldwin's legislation, The Ryan White Grantee Payment Equity Act (H.R. 3665), would authorize increased Medicaid funding to health care providers for this critical safety net. The HIV/AIDS population would greatly benefit from a higher Medicaid reimbursement rate, as it would enable clinics to expand their operations to care for the growing number of people with the disease.

"As HIV/AIDS continues to disproportionately afflict low-income Americans, lack of financial resources should not prevent these individuals from receiving health care," Congresswoman Baldwin said. "I am proud to introduce legislation that will improve health care access for some of the most vulnerable in our society."

"It is unjust – and at times unbelievable – that Americans tolerate a health care system in which the patients who desperately require care are the most hard-pressed to get it," Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-WI) offered. "When you have a disease like HIV/AIDS, but don't have the insurance coverage or money to get the care you need, it's a serious problem. HIV/AIDS is not a disease that can go without treatment, especially if those who have contracted it are to have any chance of living. We need the health care providers that receive funding through the CARE Act to fill the gaps in health insurance coverage and resources that leave HIV/AIDS patients vulnerable. I am proud to co-sponsor this legislation, which will expand funding to these providers, allowing them to care for the growing number of HIV/AIDS patients who are in need."

"The Ryan White Grantee Payment Equity Act makes a critical investment in our health care workforce that provides care to HIV/AIDS patients, and reiterates this Congress' commitment to the health and wellness of all Americans," added Rep. Doris Matsui (D-CA). "Many HIV/AIDS patients struggle everyday to get access to the quality care they need and deserve. I applaud Congresswoman Baldwin for her leadership on this issue, and am proud to be an original co-sponsor of this important piece of legislation."

Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA) added, "I am proud to join Rep. Baldwin in this effort to ensure that individuals living with HIV/AIDS have access to the care they need. In light of the current budget crises in states like California, it is especially crucial that we find ways to ensure that communities can continue caring for their HIV/AIDS populations."

"In this era of AIDS, it's essential to have public policy that assures access to health care for people with HIV, especially low income individuals who are struggling throughout the country to get the health care they need," Doug Nelson, President and CEO of the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin, said. "Ryan White grantees providing HIV health care continue to experience major increases in Medicaid and indigent patients as the epidemic affects a much lower income population."

"Congresswoman Baldwin's legislation to establish a higher Medicaid reimbursement rate for Ryan White grantees is precisely what is needed to make sure that we have the capacity to keep our clinic doors open to all HIV patients regardless of their ability to pay," Nelson said. "It will help assure that poor, low income HIV patients have access to health care and the chance for longer and healthier lives."

The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin is the state's largest provider of HIV medical, dental, and mental health care. The Ryan White Grantee Payment Equity Act has been referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee, on which Congresswoman Baldwin serves.

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